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SUBJECT: BERISHA LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT BALANCE IN
DEMOCRATIZING KOSOVO'S ASSEMBLY

REF: PRISTINA 335

Sensitive but unclassified; please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In his first several weeks as president of Kosovo's Assembly, Kole Berisha has made great progress in making it more fiscally and procedurally democratic and less autocratic. Berisha has taken public steps to distance himself from the questionable fiscal practices and domineering style of his predecessor, Nexhat Daci, meeting frequently with caucus leaders, members of civil society, and opening up the floor of plenary sessions to all who make requests to speak. He invited a series of Assembly audits by UNMIK's Auditor General. He has devoted more parliamentary attention to minority-related legislation and has agreed to a review of the Assembly's often contradictory rules of procedure. His attention to dealing with the legacy of Daci's tenure, however, has held him back from developing his own leadership style. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Since taking office on March 10, new Assembly president Kole Berisha has instituted an open door policy, holding regular meetings with caucus leaders and heads of committees, the seven-member Assembly presidency, and student groups and civil society. Procedural reform is a priority on his agenda, and according to David Payne, a parliamentary advisor provided by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Berisha instituted an events calendar to regularize plenary and committee sessions which were previously held frequently with only a day's notice. In marked contrast to former Assembly President Nexhat Daci's penchant for creatively interpreting Assembly rules, Berisha has instituted predictability of procedure. Berisha is also considering instituting a "question time" for government ministers modeled after the UK parliament. Opposition leaders Vetton Surroi and Hashim Thaci both praised his initial steps in meetings with visiting Contact Group representatives (reftel).

¶3. (SBU) Berisha takes fiscal reform of the Assembly very seriously. Daci's decision to construct a "protocol complex" in Germia (in Pristina's suburbs) at an estimated cost of

three million euros and without parliamentary approval, elicited a sea of complaints led by Surroi's opposition Reform Party Ora. Berisha invited the Auditor General, whose team is made up of locals and internationals from Deloitte and Touche, to audit not only the Germia project but all of the Assembly's books. According to an USAID institutional advisor, in two weeks of work the auditors have already documented procurement irregularities, unaccounted for office furniture (including a plasma television Daci evidently had delivered to his ski chalet), and bills for personal items such as cosmetic dentistry and clothing. A final report is set to be completed in May; Berisha told COM he will make the results public.

14. (SBU) In stark contrast to Daci's style, the self-effacing Berisha has limited himself to a small office and is allowing committees to use the marble-laden opulent space constructed for Daci's private offices for their meetings. Berisha allowed to COM that overseeing the transformation of this space into a proper conference room with simultaneous interpretation capabilities for the Assembly's multi-ethnic membership was logistically time-consuming and would cost too much money.

15. (SBU) At Prime Minister Agim Ceku's request, Berisha's staff prioritized 26 pieces of standards-related legislation which are set to be heard by the Assembly in the next three months. The first of these are laws on religious freedom, media, use of languages, cultural heritage and intellectual property rights.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Berisha has made a good start on reforming the Assembly thereby giving it and the other Kosovo government institutions improved standing with a skeptical

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Kosovo public used to credible rumors of corruption about its politicians. He has a tendency, however, to become bogged down in the details of procedural reformation. We will urge him to focus on procedural changes that would facilitate the passage of standards-related legislation. END COMMENT.

17. (SBU) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG